



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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Hypothermia: The sneaky threat

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Outdoor activities in winter are fun for the entire Family, but they can be risky if one chooses to ignore the rules of cold weather.

Hypothermia, one of winter's deadliest hazards, literally creeps in under the right conditions.

"Hypothermia is caused when the body loses more heat than it can make, either through exercise, shivering or its regular metabolism," said John W. Castellani, Ph.D., Thermal and Mountain Medicine Division, U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine, Natick, Mass. "It's more likely to occur during wet and cold conditions, like a 45 F day with heavy rain; during immersion in water less than 70 F; or when the body is exposed to very low temperatures with little clothing."

Being aware of symptoms and following established prevention measures can reduce your chances of falling victim to hypothermia.

"Protection is best provided by wearing clothing loose and in layers, not sweating during cold weather exercise, and staying dry," Castellani said.

According to the Mayo Clinic, your heart, nervous system and other organs are affected by falling body temperature. Left untreated, hypothermia can eventually lead to total heart failure, respiratory distress and death.

Covering the head, face and neck are critical to preventing heat escaping the body. Mayo researchers have found that mittens keep hands warmer than gloves because the fingers remain in close contact.

Children require special attention in cold weather.

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests parents dress infants and young children in one more layer than an adult would wear in the same conditions. Caregivers should also limit the time kids spend in the cold and allow them to come inside frequently to get warm.

More information on winter safety is available at <https://safety.army.mil>.